

An American Widow

By LOURENE RICHARDS

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It was at Lausanne, Lake Geneva, and at one of the small and quiet hotels, that Judge Fordham, U. S. A. was told by the landlord:

"You will be glad to learn that I have a compatriot of yours here. She has been here a week. She is a widow. I believe she comes from Chicago, Canada."

"Sure it isn't Philadelphia, Montana?" asked the judge.

"I will at once find out all particulars, your excellency."

"Never mind just now. I'd like a few hours' rest before meeting the widow, American or otherwise. If you will be so kind, you needn't mention to her that I am here. I came away from my home in Boston, California, to escape a widow, and, you see, I don't want to bump up against another too soon. We Americans always want to walk around awhile before getting acquainted."

"It is so, your excellency, and your wishes shall be respected," said the obsequious host.

"How does the widow happen to be here alone?" inquired the judge with out much show of interest.

"Her brother is at Lyons, France. He is a buyer of silks for Americans. He will soon be here."

"Is she good looking and rich?" asked the judge.

"Had I known, your excellency, that Chicago, Canada, had such handsome women I should have gone there for my second wife. As for riches, she has my best rooms and orders what she wants. My bill against her will be very much."

"Think she's on the marry?"

"When I saw you, sir, and knew that you were an American I said to myself:

"He comes from the same country. He looks like a widower. He appears to be rich. Why should not the widower marry the widow and thus make each other happy?"

"Thanks for your interest in the case, old man, but go slow. An American widower and an American widow will always find each other in good time if you leave them alone. Just leave it to us."

They met at the table, but were not introduced. A sharp eyed person would have noticed that they were sitting each other up. Two days later, as the widow sat on the veranda with a book in her hand, the landlord and the judge approached, and the former indulged in a dozen bows and scrapes as he said:

"I have the utmost felicitation in presenting Judge Fordham to Mrs. Chatham."

The judge found the widow to be a woman not much over thirty. She was bright and keen and self possessed. She found the judge to be a man of about forty-eight, hale and hearty and inclined to be frank spoken. Of course they became interested at once, and after a few minutes the landlord re-entered the office to say to his wife:

"Today, Marie, I have done a noble thing. The widower will marry the widow, and when they return to America they will probably live in New York, Arizona, and be happy all their days. You see that the widow and the widower were married that as a landlord I should be a magnificent success?"

Neither the widow Chatham nor Judge Fordham had a story to tell. It came out casually in conversation that she was the widow of a Chicago wholesale grocer and had taken the trip abroad at the instance of her brother Tom, who was a silk buyer for a New York house and who would soon be with them. It came out the same way that the judge had retired from the bench in New York and was now taking it easy abroad while his bonds went right on piling up interest. They found themselves agreeing on almost all subjects, especially on the greatness of Chicago and the purity of American politics, and now and then the landlord looked out to smile and turn to his wife with:

"Marie, compliment me on my magnificence. The widower and the widow are becoming more and more interested in each other."

The judge rather took charge of Mrs. Chatham after the first day. They rode out together, they boated together, they climbed the hills together. The subject of love wasn't even hinted at, but there were other persons than the landlord who smiled in a knowing way.

There was just a bit of mystery about the brother. He was to arrive at such a time and such a time, but he didn't arrive. It was all the fault of the silk men, he wrote. They were taking things easy and refused to be hustled. He would be along in good time, however, and in one of his letters he wrote that it would be a pleasure for him to meet the judge. The judge smiled grimly when this extract was read to him. He seemed to doubt it.

After their acquaintance had lasted two weeks and one day just after a telegram had been received by the widow the judge strolled into the railroad depot and found her about to take a train—that is, he thought she was. She had no baggage and appeared to avoid observation.

When she saw that she was discovered she made some excuse and left the depot in his company. She was a bit glum for awhile, but soon rallied and was very gay that evening. Two days later a telegram announced that Brother Tommy was ill at home. The widow said that she would run over there for a day or two, and the judge said he would accompany her. He had a curiosity about the silk mills, and this would be a good time to gratify it. The widow suddenly decided that Tommy might get over his illness without any of her help. She had her fair share of sisterly affection, but Tommy was one of these fellows that always played baby even with a cold in the head.

Two mornings later the judge took an early morning walk. It was an hour before breakfast. He walked down to the depot to see the 6-20 train go out. He was on time, and he saw the widow Chatham there. She doctored him and returned to the hotel instead of taking the train. When they met at breakfast neither one said anything about their walk, but the landlord rubbed his hands and smiled and said to his wife:

"Marie, my magnificence grows. The widower and the widow were out for a sunrise walk this morning. That means love and matrimony. I was the one to introduce them and bring two happy hearts together. Of course it will go into both bills as an extra."

There is a pretty fair mountain at Lausanne. It is high enough to have precipices and rugged enough to put a man out of wind to climb it. When you have followed "Lovers' walk" far enough you strike into "Heart's high

way, and a quarter of a mile farther you debouch upon a plateau called "Maiden's rest." The judge and the widow had been up there twice. On the afternoon of the early morning walk they took the path again. When they had reached the plateau and found seats and had a few words to say about the view the widow looked the judge fair in the eyes and said:

"Mr. Fordham, in about three minutes, unless you promise to leave Lausanne by the evening train, I shall begin to scream."

"Yes," he calmly replied.

"I shall run down the path shouting for help."

"Yes."

"I shall meet people and declare that you threatened me. I think you will understand what that will mean to you."

"Certainly, but there are loopholes in your plan. For instance, I have no less than three witnesses concealed behind the rocks up here. Then I have a telegram to the effect that your Brother Tommy is in custody at Lyons. I also have a second stating that his extradition papers, for which I have been waiting these many days, are ready for me."

"Where do I come in?" she asked after awhile.

"You don't come in. Tommy did the embarrassing, and you simply ran away with him. So far as my instructions go, you are to be left behind here in Europe to enjoy yourself as best you may. No doubt you have some of the stolen money to pay your bills with, but I was not instructed to arrest you. I was simply keeping tab on you until the papers were ready for Tommy. Is there anything more to say?"

"Sir, I do not know you," answered the widow as she arose and started down the path by her lonesome.

"And so you go away to Lyons?" repeated the landlord after the judge had announced his intentions.

"Yes; have to go."

"And the widow from Chicago, Canada?"

"I must leave her in your keeping. We have had a misunderstanding. You know how cantankerous American widows are."

"Marie," said the landlord to his wife that evening, "I may be magnificent and I may not. The widower and the widow have quarreled and he has started for Lyons, and it may be that he will never come back to plead for a reconciliation. The main point, however, is that I charged him two extras for falling in love with another guest of my house and falling out again, and maybe I am magnificent after all."

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